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Co-operation in the supermarket aisle: young children's accounts of family food shopping.

Structured Abstract:

Purpose: Children are increasingly seen as active consumers participating in various aspects of family food consumption. This paper looks at children's first-hand accounts of their visits to the supermarket and reports on their in store experiences as participants in the family food shopping. It offers an account of family food shopping from the perspective of the children.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Qualitative discussion groups with children aged 8-11 years research were used to elicit children's perceptions of food shopping as part of a study into food consumption experiences. This offers an opportunity to capture the children's perspective on this everyday consumption activity.

Findings: Engaging in family food shopping is part of a socialization process that introduces children to food retail environments and to shopping scripts played out in store. Young children claim to actively participate in family food shopping in store contributing in a variety of ways to family food purchases that includes making requests in store, negotiating over product choices and assisting with the food shopping. The strategies employed by the children include restricting requests to specific product categories, (usually for sweets, or cereals or products for their school lunchbox); selecting products on behalf of other family members; dissuading parents for buying certain food items and helping out in store. Most of the first-hand accounts reflect a positive experience with children contributing to the food decisions that relate directly to their food interests. The research finds relatively little conflict and more cooperation between children and their parents in an attempt to influence what goes into the shopping trolley.

Research limitations: this is a small exploratory study with a geographically constrained sample. The children's accounts cannot be verified but are presented as a way of looking at how children themselves relate to the family food shopping experience. Future research might extend the geographical scope of this investigation and consider soliciting parental views to validate the children's accounts.

Practical implications: this work provides further evidence of the ways in which children are actively included as part of family food decisions in a supermarket context. Children's in store contributions to family food can inform retailers and companies as well as policy makers.

Originality/Value: this offers a unique insight into how children view shopping with the family and relates more broadly to the discussion around children's consumption and their role as active consumers.

Paper: Research paper

Key words: children, family food shopping, cooperation, coalition, , negotiation, retail supermarket

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Introduction

Children are increasingly seen as active consumers participating in various aspects of family food consumption (Ekstrom, 2010; Marshall and O'Donohoe, 2010; SIRC 2009; Nørgaard et. al., 2007; Piacentini and Tinson, 2003; McNeal, 1999) and shopping for the family food is part of a broader socialization process that introduces them to the food retail environment (Gram, 2014; Nørgaard et. al., 2007; Drenten et. al., 2008). Amidst a call for more child centric studies (Lawlor and Prothero, 2011; Marshall, 2010; Bannister and Booth, 2005) the purpose of this study is to investigate the food consumption experiences (including food shopping) of young consumers aged between 8-11 years old. It considers children's 'lived experience' (Thompson et. al., 1989) of their visits to the supermarket and reports on their first-hand accounts as participants in family food shopping. The paper begins by reviewing some of the literature on children and family food shopping before turning to look at the strategies children use to influence their parents and the extent to which this can lead to conflict within the food store. It then outlines the research study and reports on children's own accounts of family food shopping looking at how they regard this activity and their contribution; their experiences in store and the various ways that they engage in this consumption activity. These first-hand accounts present an opportunity to see food shopping from their perspective and reflect a generally positive experience as children contribute to the family food shopping through their in-store activities.

Literature Review

Children and family food shopping

Children have an important influence on family decision making across a range of product categories including food (Ekstrom, 2010, 2007; Nørgaard et. al., 2007; Thompson et. al., 2007; Romani, 2005; Foxman et. al., 1989). Given their lack of financial independence it is perhaps not surprising that

children attempt to influence decisions related to food products that they consume as part of the family unit (Foxman et. al., 1989). While much of this influence can take place outside of the retail environment food shopping offers one opportunity to directly influence what goes into the family shopping trolley (Gram, 2014; Wilson and Wood, 2004; Quinn, 2002; McNeal, 1992; Isler et. al., 1987). As young children accompany their parents on shopping trips they are exposed to the retail supermarket environment and ‘learn’ about food shopping and food brands as part of a broader socialization process (Patton, 2014; Cook, 2010; Ward, 1974). One consequence of this is that they often exhibit relatively sophisticated ‘adult like’ shopping experiences that reflect their exposure to this retail environment. Even preschool children as young as 3-7 draw on family food shopping experiences and can be observed following shopping scripts and mimicking adult shopping patterns (Drenten et. al., 2008). Despite this we have relatively few accounts from children about how they see their role in family food shopping and know little about the strategies and tactics they use to try and influence these decisions.

Children’s influence strategies

‘...negotiation and bargaining are a part of the growing up or consumer socialisation process.....the outcomes of purchase requests primarily constituted a contest between parent and child’ (Lawlor and Prothero, 2011, p576)

While not restricted to the food or the in-store environment research has shown that children employ a range of influence strategies that include rational approaches such as bargaining and negotiation; persuasion strategies that include expressing opinions, begging and whining; emotional strategies using tactics like anger, pouting and sweet talk; and simple requests such as asking directly or expressing a need or a want (Kerrane et. al., 2012; Marquis, 2004; Lee and Collins, 2000; John, 1999; Palan and Wilkes, 1997; Mangelburg, 1990; Isler et. al., 1987; Atkin, 1978). These requests often relate to specific categories such as breakfast cereals, or lunch packs but children tend to overestimate their influence in food shopping and in a number of instances these requests are initiated by parents (Aitkin, 1978; Foxman et. al., 1989). While family food shopping can be seen as a joint activity with both parents and children participating in the task, *‘children have most influence on small and easy prepared meals, food that is easy to prepare, unhealthy food (e.g. sweets) compared to healthy products (e.g. fruit, vegetables and fish), and as regards healthy food, fruit more than vegetables’* (Nørgaard et. al., 2007, p209). In-store purchases of unhealthy foods such as sweets and snacks are likely to be unplanned and children’s affective state has an indirect effect on the role they play in the family purchase decision (Nadeau and Bradley, 2012). As well as verbalising these requests children point to products, pick up products, and look at labels in the store as a way

of influencing their parents (Rust, 1993; Aitkin, 1978). Around half of the time parents respond favourably to children's in-store requests, particularly where children are being encouraged to develop their own skills and competencies (O'Dougherty et. al., 2006; Caruana and Vassallo, 2003; Lee and Beatty, 2005,) or where they know what is acceptable to their parents and tailor their requests accordingly (Rust, 1993). Over half of final in-store grocery purchase decisions are made by the parent with just over a quarter made jointly and less than one fifth made by the children themselves. Positive influence strategies such as asking nicely are more successful and likely to result in the child making the final decision whereas negative strategies such as begging or pleading are more likely to result in the parent making the final decision (Nadeau and Bradley, 2012).

While these types of request may be seen as a form of 'pestering', manifest as a series of nagging requests arising from exposure to commercial marketing (McDermott et. al., 2006), for others it is a 'natural' part of shopping and *'a specific request for an item when shopping is taken as a kind of bringing into consciousness of the role played by the shopper and is most often viewed positively, even if it becomes a cause of contrition..'* (Miller, 1998, p21). Family food shopping is essentially about *'concern of the individual for the household'* (Miller, 1998, p106) and requests from family members are one of the ways in which relationships are negotiated. For Miller, giving into requests is a means of expressing care and affection and a way to 'buy back' the child, for example offering sweets as a reward for accompanying parents on the shopping trip. It could be argued that succumbing to children's requests actually reduces conflict and, particularly in low income families, ensures that children are not socially disadvantaged by the family's financial situation (Hamilton, 2009; Roper and La Niece, 2009). Children's requests can therefore be seen as part of a normative practice. Parental response to these requests can take a variety of forms including assent, procrastination, negotiation and dissent but children appear able to identify and respond to these accordingly (Lawlor and Prothero, 2011; Marshall et. al., 2007). Shopping then becomes a type of 'game', enacted by both parents and children across a range of products. It centres on requests and negotiation and evokes a playful element (Nash and Basini, 2012, p275). Rather than seeing children's influence as negative *'parents welcomed their (children's) input, and the knowledge and information they added to the purchase decisions was seen as beneficial'* (Thompson et. al., 2007, p194).

Avoiding conflict

Given the collective nature of family decision making and the range of individual preferences there is the potential for disagreement or conflict (Hamilton, 2009; Nørgaard et. al., 2007; Thompson et. al., 2007; Nicholls and Cullen, 2004; Valkenburg and Cantor, 2001; Spiro, 1983; Sheth, 1974; Sprey, 1969). In store disagreements are likely to revolve around specific food choices, differences in individual preferences, or childhood preferences, or financial and health related issues (Nørgaard et. al., 2007; Hughner and Maher, 2006). In low income families, for example, shopping is rarely considered an enjoyable activity and *'excluding children from the grocery shopping not only suppresses conflict but also detracts attention away from unobtainable products that are beyond the family means'* (Hamilton, 2009, p264). Despite this there is evidence that only a limited number of parent-child interactions in-store end up in conflict (Aitkin, 1987; Isler et. al., 1987) and it appears that some form of conflict avoidance may be in operation (Hamilton, 2009; Nørgaard et. al., 2007). Possible solutions to resolve the conflict include problem solving and accessing more information; persuasion with interaction between family members; bargaining and the formation of internal coalitions (Seth, 1974). Children recognise the opportunity to form a coalition with other family members in order to influence a high involvement purchase decision (Thompson et. al., 2007; Lee and Collins, 2000). This can include planned and unplanned coalitions between siblings, or between children and parents directed at influencing and persuading a purchase. Child initiated coalitions often targeted one parent who they see as being easier to persuade or more supportive but, with highly involved purchases, these are often longer term coalitions established over a period of time (Thompson et. al., 2007).

Another strategy to avoid conflict is to allow children to actively participate in the shopping activity. This provides an opportunity for parents to involve children in the food shopping by permitting them to express opinions and preferences in the store and by directly involving them in the shopping task (Gram, 2014; Nørgaard and Brunsø 2011; Nørgaard et. al., 2007). Rather than seeing the supermarket as a site of conflict, Gram (2014) observed a calm convivial atmosphere with quiet discussion between Swedish family members and the children acting as requesters, advisors and helpers. As helpers the children engage in a number of 'supportive' activities including reading from the shopping list, putting groceries on the checkout counter (most frequently reported task by both children and parents), helping at the checkout and putting groceries in the bag, or carrying shopping bags and pushing the trolley or carrying the shopping basket (Nørgaard et. al., 2007). Given the importance of the shopping cart, as a sort of collective public expression of choice and a site of negotiation (Cochoy, 2008), engaging children in this part of the shopping trip puts them at the centre of the activity. Moreover, deciding what goes into the trolley involves a process where shoppers, in this case parents and children, *'revise their perspective positions, adjust them to each*

other, adopt and adapt their distinctive points of view, each trying to 'calquer' his or her partner or the others' (Cochoy, 2008, p32). This term, derived from the French verb '*calquer*' meaning to trace or to copy a model, is used to describe the ways in which one's actions are changed in the negotiation around what is permitted to go into the trolley. This reflects both the discussion between the shoppers or 'talking calquation' and an unspoken agreement or 'mute calquation' about what is permitted. In this way the shopping script is played out in the store and even young children are socialised into particular ways of shopping (Drenten et. al., 2007). While most of these accounts are based on observations we know relatively little about how children experience food shopping and how they see their role in the store.

Methodology

Research Objectives

This research was part of an exploratory investigation into the everyday food consumption experiences of young consumers but unlike other studies it focused on the children's own accounts and their first-hand experiences. The main aims of the research were to (1) consider young children's discretionary food consumption, focusing on snacking; (2) examine Scottish children's experiences with food marketing (including in-store) and how they use food products as part of their everyday lives. Within this research agenda food shopping formed part of that broader food consumption experience and in the ensuing discussion numerous reference was made to food shopping with the family. While the literature shows that children are increasingly involved in food shopping we have little indication of how they experience food shopping. Do they have any influence on what is selected? Is food shopping confrontational? What do they do in the store? The specific aims of this paper are to look at some of the issues and themes that emerged in the discussions and to consider first; what the children themselves think about family food shopping ; second, where and how can they exert some influence in the store ; and third, the extent to which they are passive or active food shoppers.

Research method

Given the exploratory nature of this research discussion groups were used as a means of identifying the issues that were relevant to the children themselves (Lawlor and Prothero, 2011; Elliot and Lenoard, 2004; Moore and Lutz, 2000; Gunter and Furnham, 1998). Discussion groups provided an opportunity for more open discussion and provide the flexibility required to allow the discussion to develop around the issues as they emerged in the discussion. The groups utilised a semi structured

brief that focused on the children's favourite foods, eating occasions, snacking and food shopping, brand recognition and awareness of any food marketing. Specific questions related to how often they went food shopping with their parents, what happened when they went shopping with parents, what they did in the store and how parents reacted.

Discussion Groups

The study concentrated on preadolescent school children aged between 8 and 11 years old. This age group was selected as they are familiar with marketing, have exposure to multiple brands, are able to discuss their experiences and can think more abstractly (Valkenburg and Cantor, 2001; John, 1999). This 'analytical' stage of development is when preferences and tastes are developing and when children are beginning to have an influence on family decision making (John, 1999). At this age they are able to think more conceptually, to categorize and discuss their own experiences and ideas about 'who' they are and they are beginning to gain some degree of independence (Chaplin and John, 2005; John, 1999). Eight discussion groups were carried out at two schools in a predominantly middle class area of a major Scottish city. Two focus groups were conducted in May 2006 with Primary 4 children (aged 8 and 9 years old) and two with Primary 6 children (aged 10 and 11 years old). Two discussion groups were conducted with Primary 5 children (aged 9 years old) and two with Primary 6 (aged 10 years old) at another school later the same year.

Research Procedure and data analysis

As the research was carried out with children, their parents were sent a letter describing the research project and requesting permission for their children to take part. Further permission was requested from the relevant authorities. All children had the option to opt out of the research and fictitious names are used to ensure anonymity throughout the research. Children were provided with information in advance of the research and debriefed after the project. Permission to talk to the children was granted by the head teachers who approved this with the classroom teachers and parents. Notes of guidance provided by the City Council were followed. All the groups contained boys and girls and were carried out in the classroom with the teacher present, but situated away from the main discussion group. All of the discussion groups were audio recorded and the discussions lasted an average of thirty five minutes each. A total of 106 children participated in the focus groups with a mode of thirteen children and a maximum of fifteen children in any one group. While these groups are relatively large it ensured that all of the pupils had the opportunity to participate in a familiar social group. The children were keen to contribute to the discussion and talk about their food experiences. All discussion groups were transcribed and analysed using the

constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In this procedure the transcripts were reviewed and coded to identify issues and themes that emerged in the discussion. These themes were then compared across groups looking for common ideas or categories that emerged and for examples that supported or challenged these (Spiggle, 1994). This is a small exploratory study with a geographically constrained sample. The children's accounts cannot be verified but are presented as a way of looking at how children themselves relate to the family food shopping experience. This paper focuses on the children's accounts of food shopping in the supermarket with their one or more of their family.

Findings

In the course of discussions it was apparent that children were aware of most of the major UK supermarkets. Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda, Waitrose and Marks and Spencer's were all mentioned across the groups reflecting the children's family shopping experience and the local store provision. Most of the children talked about food shopping in relation to supermarket shopping rather than local stores or markets and their awareness of the major grocery retailers reflected exposure to retail brand advertising. Children were able to accurately recall marketing slogans such as - 'Tesco – every little helps' or 'That's Asda Price'. During this period there was an advertising campaign running for Marks and Spencer's which the children talked about in detail playing on the fun aspect of the "not just food, M&S food" strapline and recalling the television campaign. Most were aware of in-store promotions such as 'Buy One Get One Free'(BOGOF) or in-pack promotions for cereal products and talked about 'free toys' and how they had been attracted to cereal promotions in-store, only to find that they did not actually like the product – *'Sugar Puffs, yeah! And I didn't actually like them; I just wanted the toy inside (Power Rangers)'* (11 years old, Boy). These accounts suggest that children's experience with food products, and brands, are multi-faceted and extended far beyond the retail store environment. While there was relatively little mention of specific food brands those cited were for cereal products or snacks which tend to be more heavily promoted (Marshall et. al., 2007).

Family food shopping

One of the first themes to emerge was the extent to which children claim to go food shopping with their parents. Like many children this age they are obliged to accompany their parent(s), usually their mother, unless childcare is available. They are involved in family food shopping in the sense that they accompany adults on the shopping trip, this is something they have to do, but they are engaged more directly in trying to influence the choices in store (Gram, 2014; Kerrane et. al., 2012;

Nørgaard et. al., 2007; Aitkin 1978). Most of the children thought that these food shopping trips were *'boring'*, as one girl noted *'But me and my brother, we don't like going shopping – it's boring'* (9 years old, girl). Yet for some of the children going food shopping can be turned to their advantage and the chore of accompanying 'mum' around the store has to be weighed up against the opportunity to directly influence what is bought. The negotiation about what to buy can begin well in advance of the shopping trip. As one child reveals *'Well my mum normally goes to the shops but I'll tell her what I want, what I kind of need, so some snacks, but I need – if I ever do go to the shops with my mum then I'll pick out like something else and then get a sweet at the end'* (10 years old, girl). Even when not accompanying parents, as the above quote reveals, children are making requests and contributing to the shopping list by asking for specific food items (Aitken, 1978).

These requests continue in the store and in some cases are initiated by the parents who ask the children what they want during the shopping trip. As one child commented *'Well, when we go shopping, I go to my mum and she says 'what snack do you want for this week'.... So I just choose a bar or something'* (9 years old, Girl). In this illustration the child is being asked directly by her mother what she wants as a snack. The presence of the child in the store allows her mother to engage her in the shopping task and accommodate her preferences thus avoiding one potential point of conflict (Nørgaard et. al., 2007). For the children there are certain benefits of this, not least they get to have a direct influence on what is bought on the shopping trip. This can be seen in the following quote from an older boy - *'You get to buy stuff you want, not like manky cornflakes. You get to buy Cinnamon Grahams and Shreddies and stuff'* (11 years old, boy). Children not only reject specific products, the *'Manky cornflakes'* they request certain brands – *'Cinnamon Grahams'*. Snacks and cereals are two of the product categories most frequently mentioned by children where they are allowed to have some influence on what is chosen in store (Drenten et. al., 2008; Nadeau and Bradley, 2012). The store therefore becomes an important site for making requests and these accounts suggest that this is more permissible in certain product categories that are 'approved' by parents. One category where children were directly involved was in the choice or selection of products for their school lunch box and this is seen as a positive outcome by the children *'If I go then I choose things for my lunchbox, but if I don't, my mum gets these fruit bars which don't taste very nice'* (11 years old, girl). The intervention to stop parents buying things the children do not like was not confined to snacks and lunchbox purchases but included 'boring stuff' (adult food) and family meal items. They talked about helping out with selection of other products such as biscuits, or choosing what fruit to buy and made reference to other areas of the store including the bakery section or, in larger stores, the clothing section. Most of the children recognise going shopping as an

opportunity to influence the outcome of the trip in their favour and contributed to the shopping by helping decide what to buy (Gram, 2014).

Coalition strategies and multiple requests

There was some discussion of 'nagging' parents but not everyone agreed that this was a successful strategy; although it did work 'sometimes'. Repeated requests for sweets and treats seem to be part of the in-store strategy for some children in the hope that parents will give in and buy the item but it was a fine line between success and annoying their parents. Of course they acknowledge that parents can refuse or ignore their multiple requests, discuss and bargain with them, or give in! Most of the children were adamant that their parents had the situation under control, however, they understood that how they framed the request could have a bearing on whether it was granted or not. Coalitions were formed between siblings or children and parents with promises to share items, or talking about their brother's or sister's preferences. Where siblings are shopping together in the store they can combine their resources as this quote shows *'Well, we just kind of like go and get some things while my mum gets something else. We get the job done faster so we can go home and watch telly. And my brother and I always go up the very quiet end of Tesco's and we get this one big packet of sweets and we take it back and that's our stash for the week, but my mum pays for it'. (10 years old, girl)*. If the request was for something for the whole family, such as ice cream, then it was more likely to be successful. So, individual requests could be disguised as family requests by using this 'coalition' argument. One example of this was to ask for a family 'multi-pack' as one way to persuade parents to buy a product; this was a request on behalf of the whole family not just the child. They also employed various strategies to advance their requests, for example, one girl told how she will make a request when shopping with her father with the promise that she will share the chocolate with her sister; fully aware that her sister does not like the product – *'Well, actually I'm pretty good at it. If I'm at the shop with my dad, I'll say 'Oh, I'll share that with my sister' – but then I know because my sister doesn't like it, so I can have it all to myself. And he just forgets. (11 years old, girl)*. In these accounts we can see some evidence of how coalitions can work even in the absence of the other parties on the shopping trip (Kerrane et. al., 2012, Thompson et. al., 2007, Lee and Collins, 2000). Many of the children recognised these playful aspects; echoing Nash and Basini's (2012) notion of the 'game' being played out in store. But this met with different parental responses depending on what was being requested and who was being asked. In the following quote a child's request for fruit was approved but a request for sweets was restricted to one item *'Well I like it because we sort of pick up stuff and we ask our mum if we can get it, like she'd let us get fruit but*

she'd only let us get one sweetie or something and then we'd just help her do other stuff' (9 years old, girl).

More co-operation than conflict

In accompanying their parents to the supermarket many of these children are familiar with the layout of the store and products they sell (Drenten et. al., 2008). As one child commented *'Usually I would go to where all the chocolates are and ask mum and she would say 'no!'' (11 years old, boy).* The fact that the child knew where the chocolate was shows some awareness of what is on offer but also a sense of what is permissible. One of the ways in which the children courted favour with their parents was by 'helping out' and getting involved in the shopping. For a number this entailed pushing the trolley around the store. As this quote illustrates *'Well, say sometimes I get to take the trolley and get to take the food, but when I was small I did it and I took too many like chocolate, sweets, crisps and stuff. But, so she'd say, she'd persuade me by saying 'if you buy some proper food that will last then I'll buy you' like say we're in Safeways, 'I'll buy you a small sweet' (11 years old, girl).* There is a sense of responsibility here as the child explains how their behaviour has changed as they got older. By taking some responsibility and buying 'proper' food she is rewarded with a sweet. In another case pushing the trolley actually became part of the fun of shopping and a way of alleviating the boredom *'Well I drive the trolley usually and that's the second thing I like. I like charging about the store in the trolley' (9 years old, Boy).* Here we see an example of the child 'driving' the trolley, rather than being a 'passenger' or accomplice. He is able to control it's speed, for example, slowing down in order to put sweets into the trolley; a tactic that his mother was only too aware of, but one that he was occasionally allowed to 'get away with'. By directly engaging children and by giving them some responsibility for pushing the trolley it physically locates them to where the main shopping activity is taking place, as opposed to walking or running alongside or in front of their parent(s). Unlike younger children who often have to sit in the shopping trolley and are pushed around (Cochoy, 2008) these children are not restricted or limited in their access to products by the pace or height of the trolley. In giving them responsibility for pushing the trolley they can dictate the pace of the trolley to some extent, as the quote shows 'charging about the store'.

The other way in which these children helped out was by actually going and getting specific food items to put in the shopping trolley (Gram, 2014) or by 'foraging' for items in the store. Where there are several children accompanying parents this may be a way to engage everyone in the family shopping, but the children tended to talk about what they did as individuals. Many of the children, like the eleven year old boy who knows where the chocolates are located, can navigate the store in search of items for the trolley. The shopping trolley then becomes the focal point and brings the

parents and children together as well as adding a fun dimension to the shopping. By assisting in this way children can be involved and influence decisions in the store (Nørgaard et. al., 2011). As Cochoy notes, *'to the children, it (shopping trolley) provides a playground as well as a rest place'* (2008, p29).

Finally, one of the 'rewards' for going shopping is the 'sweet at the end'. This treat is seen as a reward for accompanying parents and actively participating in the shopping trip (Miller, 1998). It was mentioned explicitly by a number of the children who saw food shopping as an opportunity to 'earn' this treat. This was usually a small individual sweet or confectionary item that was bought during, or towards the end of, the shopping trip. However, treats were not confined to the children, as one boy commented *'Well, I only go shopping with my dad and my mum writes a shopping list. And because my dad's a big softy, I sometimes get a little treat and sometimes he gets a little treat!'* (9 years old, boy). This description of the boy's father as a 'big softy' gives us an idea about who is most likely to give into the boy's requests and who might be a good coalition partner. This treat often signals the completion of the task and completes the transformation of the shopping trip from work to fun.

Discussion and conclusion

Young children see themselves as active participants in family food shopping, contributing in a variety of ways that includes making requests in store, negotiating over product choices and assisting with the food shopping. They are familiar with family shopping scripts and recognise opportunities afforded in store to influence what is purchased and the rewards for getting involved. They deployed a range of tactics to this end that include restricting requests to specific product categories, (usually for sweets, or cereals or products for their school lunchbox); selecting products on behalf of other family members; dissuading parents for buying certain food items and helping out in store. Children elected to talk about those aspects of food shopping that they were interested in and where they exerted some influence. There was little by way of discussion around the bulk of the food shopping. They translated and interpreted food shopping in their own terms, turning it from a boring activity into something that could be fun, helping out with the anticipation of an immediate reward in the store or being able to influence what is available at home. While these children were not spending their own money in the supermarket they were influencing the buying patterns of the family and learning the rules and shopping scripts in the process.

Research contribution

While much of the previous work is based on observations and parental accounts this research attempts to capture what children think about family food shopping based on their experiences.

Rather than seeing food shopping as a site for conflict this work finds some support for Gram's (2014) claim that food shopping, at least from the children's perspective, is much more convivial and less prone to conflict. It suggests that children when given some responsibility embrace it and actively engage in the shopping trip. This is, in part, because they rationalise it as an opportunity to have some input into what goes into the family shopping trolley. As a consequence, in store requests are a regular feature of their shopping trips but this is tempered by an understanding of where and when such requests are appropriate. Moreover, these requests both originate from the children themselves and are initiated by parents trying to accommodate their children's preferences (Hughner and Maher, 2006) or to solicit their opinions on the preferences of other family members. Overall, the sense is that for these children the food shopping trip is much less confrontational and more aligned with the sort of 'game' that Nash and Basini (2012) talk about. Part of this process involves forming coalitions, real time and remote, with other family members as part of a persuasive tactic that they can draw on to coax parents to buy, or not buy, certain items. While some of this negotiation between parents and children is verbally expressed through requests or 'talked calculation' physically helping out, by pushing the trolley or getting specific items, allows children leverage in a form of 'mute calculation'. Children are aware that in assisting with the shopping they can exert more influence over what is chosen and part of that is conditional on their participation. Taken together this can be seen as part of the 'calquer' (Cochoy, 2008) around shopping and what is permitted in the trolley. While children did not talk about helping out in terms of their providing 'labour' or 'working' it could be seen as part of an exchange and one that is rewarded by parents with a 'treat' at the end of the shopping trip. In turn it may alleviate some of the parental concerns around giving in or yielding to multiple requests. An equally important element in all of this is the recognition that fun is not just something associated with merchandising sweets, snacks and cereal products but can be an integral part of the shopping trip for the child. Moreover, helping out with the shopping not only empowers children to some degree it shifts the focus of shopping from being boring to being fun; the adult work of shopping becomes child's play.

Practical Implications

While retailers are using fun both off line and online the act of shopping has to be considered in relation to how the children perceive it. One implication is that we should find ways to encourage children to engage across a broader range of food categories that makes the act of food shopping better for them and their parents. Fun elements have been incorporated into marketing food products but much less consideration has been given the act of food shopping (Elliott, 2008; de la Ville et. al., 2010; Barrey et. al., 2010). Like the young girl whose mother who offers a reward if she

selects some 'proper food', we could encourage children to more actively engage in helping with shopping across a broader range of food categories and consider the healthful benefits from giving them some responsibility for this task.

Limitations and future research

This is a small geographically constrained study focused on one age group of middle class children with data on shopping collected as part of a broader discussion around children's food experiences. Hence the results, while reflecting the experiences of these young consumers, may not be generalizable across different age groups, socio-economic groups or other countries. While the open and public nature of the research approach captures what is considered important to these children at the time of the discussion it may not have considered the full range of shopping issues and the views of the children have not been verified or confirmed by other family members. This is an account of how they perceive the family shopping trip. Future research might investigate some of the issues raised in this research in more detail and draw on other approaches such as 'consumer' or in-store surveys to quantify and measure children's views on shopping and their role and participation. While we do not have accounts from their parents, or any way of qualifying the children's accounts, this research suggests that children are more active negotiators than passive participants when family food shopping in the supermarket and finds limited evidence of family conflict. If anything there is more cooperation than conflict in these accounts of family food shopping. Just as children appear to understand where there is '*scope for negotiation and where this would be futile*' (Marshall et. al., 2007, p176) their requests in the supermarket might be seen as part of a 'normal healthy' family life that provides an opportunity for discussion and engagement.

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